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Why Missions in Latin America?

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Latin America is a land of great rivers, of vast unexplored regions, and tremendous contrasts in degrees of civilization. The eyes of the world have long been focused upon these great countries, the scene of many revolutions. Both European and Asiatic powers have greatly desired to inhabit their sparsely populated areas. Japanese, as well as Russians and Germans have immigrated in considerable numbers. It is said that Hitler at one time remarked, "We shall make a new Germany of South America."

Latin America boasts 7½ million square miles of territory, more than twice the size of the United States, and a population of 125 million people, constituting a great admixture of races. Statistics tell us that of this number, 15 millions are pure negroes, 25 millions pure whites, 17 millions surviving Indians, and 68 millions of mixed blood.

To the question "Why Missions in Latin America?" several answers may be given.

Because of the Unfortunate Beginnings of Its Colonization.

When Anglo-Saxon colonists came to North America, it was to secure freedom of worship. With this worthy motive, they brought with

them the Word of God, were accompanied by their wives, set up homes, and settled down to family life. They did not intermingle or intermarry with the Indians and consequently remained a pure race.

In the conquest of Latin America the exact opposite was the case. Adventurers from Spain and Portugal came to exploit the land, robbing its wealth and sending to the Mother Countries all that was of commercial value. They intermarried with the natives, whom they shamefully ill-treated and reduced to slavery. History records that between 1531 and 1540 the Spanish completely conquered the great Inca Empire of Peru and destroyed its advanced civilization. The story is one of brutality and murder, in which 8 million peace-loving people were reduced to one million broken-hearted serfs.

Because of the Failure of the Roman Catholic Church to Meet the Spiritual Need of the People.

This religious body has been largely responsible for the conditions described above. John Gunther has truthfully written that "Neither Spain nor Portugal experienced the Reformation, consequently knowing nothing of its virility and cleansing power brought about by that justifiable conflict in the Church."

Four hundred years of ceaseless activity have proved beyond all dispute the inadequacy of Roman Catholicism ever to uplift or save

a people. Latin America is still sadly illiterate and backward, and in most places every effort to enlighten and help has been opposed by this church. It is said that the educational budget of New York City in 1925 exceeded that for all the Republics of South America. The priests have destroyed the Scriptures in large quantities, for they thrive upon the ignorance and superstition of the people. Early pioneers of the Gospel were also persecuted unto death.

Sacrilege and irreverence for sacred verities have prevailed for centuries. Visitors are shocked to find commercial firms stooping to blasphemy in trading their wares: thus one is confronted by such signs as "Pharmacy of Jesus", "Fishmonger of Holy Mary", and "Butcher Shop of the Holy Spirit."

The priests are largely responsible for the low morals of the people. Their professed celibacy in many cases is but a farce. Extortionate fees for religious rites cause great numbers to dispense with the marriage vows, so that illegitimate children abound. Trading in crucifixes, images, and indulgences has made multitudes into idolators and contributed to their degeneracy. It is gratifying to know that in some Republics, notably Brazil, this church, while still influential, is gradually losing its hold and there is increasing agitation against its political interference. Today many convents and monasteries have been turned into public institutions. Multitudes feel they have been so miserably deceived that they have turned from religion to atheism.

Because of the Long Neglect of Latin America by the Protestant Church.

While many missionaries were sent to other lands, those to Latin America were comparatively few because it was thought to be already spiritually provided for. We are grateful to God that during the last three or four decades Bible-loving Christians have been aroused to the great challenge of unevangelized millions, and missionaries have gone forth in larger numbers. Roman Catholic-controlled governments continue to hinder the entrance of such, and today the psychology of the "good-neighbor" policy increases the difficulties of getting new workers into some Republics.

Because of the Results Attending the Gospel Work That Has Been Done.

Large numbers have been brought to a saving knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. There is today an increasing demand for the Gospel in its purity and simplicity. In many centers years of sowing are now being followed by a glorious reaping. In more recent years a number of Missions have given themselves devotedly to the task of pioneering and evangelizing large sections hitherto unreached. A recent census puts the Protestant Church membership at more than two million, and we rejoice to believe that at least one and one-fourth million souls can be said to be truly born-again Christians.

However, one and one-fourth million believers out of 125,000,000 people presents a

tremendous challenge to those who would be faithful to the command of Christ to "preach the Gospel to every creature." One of the present pressing needs is to train many more nationals for the Christian ministry and to help the churches to advance on indigenous lines. Costly and sacrificial service has been rendered to the Indian tribes. Both wild and semi-tamed groups have been reached, chiefly by independent missionary societies, with widely varying visible results. Nomadic peoples are the most difficult of all to evangelize.

Latin America is still largely neglected, very many towns and villages, and whole jungle sections yet await the Good News of Saving Grace. This fact constitutes a loud call to the Lord's people for increased service by praying, giving, and going.

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